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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9697
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INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 1494
RUEHAO/AMCONSUL CURACAO 1172

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARAMARIBO 000510

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FOR DEFENSE SECRETARY ROBERT GATES FROM AMBASSADOR LISA
BOBBIE SCHREIBER HUGHES

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/21/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NS](#)

SUBJECT: (C) SUBJECT: BRIEFING INFORMATION FOR OCTOBER 6
COURTESY CALL BETWEEN DEFENSE SECRETARY GATES AND
SURINAMESE PRESIDENT VENETIAAN

REF: A. REFTELS: (A) PARAMARIBO 501

[1](#)B. (B) PARAMARIBO 509

Classified By: Ambassador LBSH for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Preview

[1](#)1. (C) President Venetiaan has agreed to a short (15 minute) courtesy call late in the afternoon of Saturday, October 6, immediately following your visit to the USNS Comfort. Venue for the meeting will be either the Presidential Palace or the President's Cabinet Office, both in Paramaribo. At that same venue, and immediately following your courtesy call, we propose (and are attempting to confirm with the Office of the President) that Venetiaan participate with you in a brief (15 minute) ceremony to officially close the Comfort mission.

President of the Republic of Suriname, H.E. President Runaldo Ronald Venetiaan (phonetic: FENEchiyan): a Biography

[1](#)2. (C) Three-term President Venetiaan (1991-1996; 2000-present) has a relatively long history in Surinamese politics. Originally a mathematics professor, he became chairman of the National Party of Suriname (NPS) in 1993, and was elected a member of the National Assembly in 1996. He is married and the father of four grown children. Relations between the 71-year-old Venetiaan and Post are cordial, but not warm. Nor is the distant Venetiaan an especially popular leader with the Surinamese population.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Venetiaan is, however, a canny politician whose strategy of non-confrontation has enabled him to hold together a multi-party governing coalition that is riven with infighting yet clings to a 4-seat majority in the 51-seat parliament. In Suriname's Dutch-model consociational politics, parties laboriously reach consensus with the goal of dividing up available resources, ministries, ambassadorships, and other spoils of power, and delivering them to their (often ethnically-based) constituencies.

Background Information and Issues: Gates/Venetiaan Courtesy Call

(SBU)

¶4. Issue 1: Despite biases to the contrary, Suriname should consider the United States a strong partner.

Background Information: President Venetiaan's north-south bias with respect to the United States is evident in his public statements. In August 2007, media reported Venetiaan's comments that in the post-Cold War period the United Nations has had a difficult time realizing its goals because the United States has a monopoly on power and determines the fate of the rest of the world. In June 2007, Venetiaan was the only CARICOM Head of State or Government to decline an invitation to meet President Bush during the Conference on the Caribbean in Washington. The reason: Conference timing conflicted with his birthday.

The President is enthusiastic about regional integration and Suriname has shown a tendency to downplay relations with the United States and Europe in favor of ties with CARICOM, Cuba, and Venezuela (and also outside of the region with China, India, and Indonesia). He met with Hugo Chavez on his return trip from the 2006 UN General Assembly and called him our brother when I presented my credentials to him in September ¶2006. Despite Venetiaan's biases, he should recognize that the United States is committed to Suriname, and to the region. The USNS Comfort, ongoing IMET and past FMF support, MEDRETES, and New Horizons provide tangible evidence of our value as a partner.

¶5. (U) Issue 2: The United States has demonstrated its commitment to work with Suriname as it further professionalizes its armed forces, and strengthens civil-military relations, democracy, and the rule of law.

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Background Information: Through the United States Southern Command (SouthCom), Suriname's Ministry of Defense (MOD) and its armed forces have developed a strong, multifaceted partnership that, through example, has helped Suriname on the road to stronger civil-military relations and a more professional military. This in turn is critical to the furtherance of democracy and the rule of law in Suriname where, since military rule ended in 1992, there has been a strained relationship between the civilian government and the armed forces. Venetiaan likely harbors some residual antipathy towards the military due to his imprisonment and alleged mistreatment under the regime of former military strongman (and current member of parliament) Desi Bouterse.

Talking Points

-- Appreciate your flexibility in agreeing to meet on a Saturday afternoon.

-- Pleased to have this opportunity to visit your country while the USNS Comfort is here to provide medical services to the people of Suriname.

-- Thank you for the support that your government, and in particular your Ministries of Defense and Health, have given to the Comfort mission.

-- Understand that Surinamers and Americans have worked closely throughout this entire process so that the Comfort's visit would be a true benefit for the people of Suriname.

-- Hope that you see the Comfort as the latest in a long list of United States programs which demonstrate support and friendship from the people and government of the United States to the people and government of Suriname.

-- Certainly that was the intent of President Bush when he

sent the Comfort and its doctors and nurses to this region.

-- As you are doubtless aware, our United States Southern Command has a strong, multifaceted relationship with your Ministry of Defense and armed forces which includes humanitarian as well as military aid.

-- We are strongly committed to working with our partners in the region to further professionalize their armed forces while also strengthening civil-military relations.

-- Speaking of regional issues, I would be interested in your views, as President, on the recent decision by the ILOS regarding the maritime border.

-- Thank you again for taking the time to receive me.
SCHREIBER HUGHES